

# Succeeding in the Global Worlds of Life & Work: Evaluation of the Worlds of Work Pilot Project (2007)

*"The WOW program has broadened my outlook on life and my future career. This week has been an experience beyond words as I have learnt so much about myself, about other people and how I can communicate with a range of people and understand them. I feel this program has given me more hope for the future and given me the motivation to succeed in different aspects of my life" [Student].*

This report summarises the findings of research conducted by Helen Stokes and Malcolm Turnbull at the Australian Youth Research Centre.

## April 2008

## Context

The purpose the Worlds of Work (WOW) program is to build the capacity of students from socially and economically disadvantaged communities to effectively participate in the future global worlds of work. The WOW Pilot was devised and delivered by City Learning Centre staff during the second half of 2007. It is an offshoot of Education Foundation Cityscape and Welcome to My World programs, and aims to extend the City Centre model and methodology into personalised, independent learning about the worlds of work.

The WOW program is based at the Education Foundation's City Learning Centre, and in proximity of a diversity of participating workplaces. The Pilot comprised a five day sequence of activities and workshops aimed (a) at enhancing the students' connectedness with the City of Melbourne; (b) at providing opportunities for them to explore definitions of success in work and life; and (c) at providing opportunities for the students to develop the skills and strengths needed to create their own pathways in work and life

Participants in the Pilot were groups of Year 9 and 10 students, and their teachers, selected from eleven state secondary schools. Most of the schools were defined as facing disadvantage. In some cases the WOW week was offered as a stand alone educational experience; in other cases, it was offered as a follow-up to an earlier City Centre experience and was an integrated part of a school's careers syllabus. As well as providing exposure to the CBD and Melbourne's public transport network, WOW activities included a range of opportunities to visit and interact with major city corporations and organizations (including Workplace Breakfasts, Classroom to Boardroom seminars), a series of skills development classes and workshops ('Communicating with WOW', 'WOW Enterprise Skills', 'Imagine Me: Goal Setting / Dreaming', 'Brand Me'), and presentations by Inspirational Speakers and the students themselves.

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# Findings

Student, teacher and workplace feedback testify to the overall success of the WOW Pilot Program (a) in engaging and challenging the student (and teacher) participants; and (b) in achieving the program's stated objectives.

## Survey Responses

Survey results indicate that, as a result of their participation in the WOW program, 82% of students are now thinking more about the kind of work experience they would like to do, 79% now believe they have a clearer view of how they would like to work in the future while 77% feel more confident about the prospect of job interviews.

75% of students had discovered what it meant to be enterprising during the program. 85% of them had discovered their own enterprising skills; 83% wished to develop more enterprise skills for use in school, work experience and work.

As a result of the WOW experience, 75% of students were more likely to work harder to succeed in school; 71% were more likely to stay at school longer; and 76% planned to consider further (or different) studies after leaving school. 78% of students now took more responsibility for their learning than they would have done previously.

82 % of students now felt they had a stronger sense of themselves; 81% had a better understanding of their key strengths and skills (and how to develop and use them); 83% believed themselves more likely to use their skills and strengths to help achieve their goals.

### Objective 1.

#### **To build students' sense of identity, belonging and connectedness to the City of Melbourne**

Student accounts of locating and accessing the City Centre and various workplaces, negotiating the public transport network and successfully participating in specific component activities such as a visit to Eureka Tower, Melbourne Precinct walks and MP3 Interviews, demonstrated and confirmed significantly increased connectedness with the City of Melbourne. This 'connectedness' was supported by survey results which indicated that 87% of the sample now felt "more confident" about navigating the streets of Melbourne while 82% now saw themselves as part of both the City of Melbourne and their own suburban community. Teachers and students commented favourably on the opportunities provided by the activities to enhance their knowledge of the City, and to explore concepts such as 360 degree feedback in a novel and practical way.

### Objective 2.

#### **To provide new experiences, connections and opportunities for students to explore definitions of success and the skills and strategies essential to success in the CBD environment**

Similarly, uniformly enthusiastic teacher and student responses to the Enterprise Skills and Communication Skills workshops, the Classroom to Boardroom lunch and Brand Me activities illustrated (a) the effectiveness of program delivery and (b) the effectiveness of the program generally in providing the students with "new experiences, connections and opportunities ... to explore definitions of success", as well as training in "the skills and strategies essential to success in the CBD environment". Eighty seven percent of the students surveyed felt that the program had expanded their sense of what was possible while almost 90% now had a better understanding of "what it takes to succeed". Interviewees provided numerous anecdotal examples of having drawn successfully on aspects of their WOW training in subsequent work experience situations.

In the case of one school, from a socially and economically disadvantaged area, this was one of the first times that a student had tackled work experience outside the local area. The teacher commented that, without the WOW program, the student would not (a) have been aware of the possibility of work experience in the City, nor (b) have had the chance to make the necessary contacts. "The most useful aspect of WOW was definitely the contacts ... Now [the kids] know they can ring the person whose number or e-mail they got. They would never have thought of work experience in the City before", confirmed another teacher.

### Objective 3.

To develop students' capacity to utilise their skills and strengths to create their own pathways and achieve their future aspirations

Survey data was slightly more qualified on the issue of students utilising identified skills and strengths to "create their own pathways". Only 71% of the sample intended to stay at school longer, for instance. At the same time, 79% felt they had a clearer view of how they would like to work in the future while 82% had a "stronger sense of themselves". Interview responses were more emphatic, students citing improved school attendance, changes in behaviour, recognition of the importance of schooling, and clearer perspectives on possible careers as outcomes of attending the Pilot Program.

Talks by Inspirational Speakers, the Alignment workshop and the first workplace visit were identified, in both survey and information data, as the activities from which the students learned most.

Interviewees stressed the importance of the WOW experience in enabling them (a) to develop reflective processes (reassessment of the concepts of 'work' and 'success', for example); (b) to develop networks (including making contact with appropriate sources of career advice); and (c) to develop social skills (increasing confidence and interpersonal skills and expanding social contacts).

*"One of our students networked with the staff. On his own initiative he spoke to the staff and asked for the work experience coordinator and got their email contacts"*  
[Teacher]

Teacher responses highlighted intense professional satisfaction at the maturity, work capacity and complex thinking typically demonstrated by students during the WOW week.

*"... [an] opportunity for deeper conversations connecting work and what they want for life's journey not just career. At present there are not many spaces in the classroom to explore these deeper conversations but would like to have them. It is important that experience of WOW integrates with what it means for the young people in their lives, and their life's journey."* [Teacher]

Teachers and students recognised that much of the appeal of the WOW Pilot program lay in its "difference to school". One teacher lamented that many of her peers regarded learning as happening only "when kids are in the classroom". WOW, by contrast, "modelled a different way of working with kids that used community resources" [Teacher]. "In the classroom the students are told what to do", observed another teacher:

*"... [Whereas] at WOW they were taught skills and a chance to use some of these skills such as leadership, team work, showing initiative and taking responsibility. It was a chance for the students to operationalise these."* [Teacher]

Participants noted also the success of WOW in providing disadvantaged young people with role models, in nurturing the development of mentor relationships, and in facilitating their contact with sympathetic and informed adult listeners.

*"The program has such an exciting feel about it. The people who organised and participated in it were so inspiring and generous in spirit. They gave the kids something they would never usually get back in the classroom. They gave them the overview of the world at work and how they work, succeed and interact. They shared their lives and their rich tapestries of experience."* [Teacher]

*"You are all such supportive people that have helped me to become a better person. Bravo to you all ... I feel really privileged to have met you all."* [Student]

*"I am grateful to the WOW team for the encouragement, positivity and making this week an experience that will help me throughout life, career wise and personally."*  
[Student]

While levels of student interest, application and enjoyment underlined the great success of WOW in modelling approaches to learning that were significantly "different from school", there were strong indications that the week's experiences reinforced the importance of schooling for many students. Interview data confirmed that WOW's connections and perceived relevance to general school programs were maximised when the week of activities was offered as a formal part of the syllabus, and thus integrated into the school structure (rather than as a one-off elective).

Interview and anecdotal data highlighted a number of impediments to successful participation in the WOW Program, among them the difficulty experienced by some schools in persuading students to move outside their 5km radius, reported parental opposition, possible financial constraints and school priorities. There were strong indications that integrating the WOW Program into the overall Year 10 careers syllabus tended to give it more credence with parents, students and the schools.

Students recognised that success at both school and WOW depended on how much the individual was willing to put into the process: "You have to participate ... Some kids don't join in ... so you don't get much out of it" [Student]. One student credited the WOW experience with getting her back on track: "WOW gave me a better attitude about school and what's ahead ... now I come home happier. Mum is pleased" [Student].

# Recommendations

## For Students

The success of the WOW program in engaging and challenging the participants was confirmed by emphatic student, teacher and workplace recommendation

- That it continue, be offered to future groups as a matter of course, and (where possible) be expanded.

While survey data indicated that the Day One Program component 'MP3 Street Walks' was seen as less engaging or meaningful than other activities, there was strong consensus:

- That all existing program elements be retained.\*

A number of students offered specific suggestions on ways to enhance future WOW programs. These included:

- Increasing the diversity of workplaces and speakers. ("It was fantastic but I would like to see different worlds of work rather just the business and corporation worlds").
- Increasing the amount of time spent visiting particular workplaces or in "actually doing some of the stuff" described by company reps and guest speakers.
- Increasing program time to two weeks.

One student would have welcomed greater opportunities to mix with other schools on the program.

## For Workplaces

Student calls for increased time at workplaces were echoed by workplace representatives who argued the case for:

- Half-day "hands on" placements in selected work environments;
- Longer interactions, in smaller groups, for parts of sessions such as Boardroom Breakfast.
- A fuller preliminary briefing on the backgrounds and interests of the students.
- Establishing a corporation-based Mentor program to guide students "through their desired career path ... This may attract talented students to our company".

## For Schools

In line with WOW's overall aim of building the capacity of students from socially and economically disadvantaged communities to participate in future global worlds of work and in acknowledgement of the difficulties often faced by teachers in engaging these students in the program, it is recommended:

- That priority and funding be given to schools within these communities to assist student attendance
- That schools wishing to participate offer WOW as a compulsory part of the Year 9 or 10 syllabus, either within the work experience program or as part of a careers or SOSE subject.
- That schools provide follow-up programs and activities when students return to school.

It is recognised that the WOW program was a Pilot study, that workshops were trialled "until they hit the mark", and that facilitators have completed their own in-house evaluations of the success or otherwise of the Program and its components. As a result, staff indicated that some aspects of the week have undergone revision and will be presented differently in 2008 For example:

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  - The Melbourne Precincts Walks & Interview activity has been modified to include a photographic component and omitting the use of MP3s in favour of other technology
  - The week has been slightly reconfigured in a bid to avoid confusion over such key concepts as 'Signature Strengths', '360 degree feedback' and 'Star Skills. (The Tuesday Workshop will focus solely on Signature Strengths in future).
  - The Induction process has been changed with WOW staff now going out to schools.
  - Daily Reflection and Recharge time has been increased.